



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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NEWS RELEASE

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USDA announces Conservation Security Program sign-up in two Massachusetts watersheds

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that selected watersheds in Berkshire County and Essex County are among the 202 watersheds nationwide to be included in the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in 2005. Farm owners or operators who have land in the selected watersheds may be eligible to apply for CSP during the sign-up period that runs now through **May 27, 2005**.

The purpose of CSP is to reward the best conservation farmers for their stewardship efforts and motivate others to become good stewards of the land. CSP, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, was introduced last summer in 18 watersheds nationwide. This spring marks the first opportunity for Massachusetts farmers who practice good soil and water conservation to participate.

The CSP sign-up process requires farmers to conduct a self-assessment to determine on their own whether or not they are eligible for the program. Information on the CSP program, including maps of the selected watersheds and links to the self-assessment workbook, are available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp.

Farmers who believe that they may be eligible for CSP should contact the local NRCS office for Berkshire County at 413-443-1776 or Essex County at 978-692-1904 to get details on and reserve a spot at one of several upcoming informational meetings and/or workshops.

In Essex County, the watershed areas lie within the North Coastal watersheds of the Ipswich, Parker and Merrimack rivers. In Berkshire County the watershed area lies within the north and central portions of the Housatonic River and the Farmington River.

This new stewardship program offers payments, for five or ten-year contracts, on part or all of an agricultural operation. The more conservation work farmers have completed and promise to do in the near future, the higher payment you are eligible to receive. To qualify for CSP, farms must have soil erosion and water quality practices in place, including nutrient and pest management. Lands that are eligible include cropland, orchards, vineyards, hay land, pasture lands, and incidental forest land.

About one eighth of the nation's eligible farmers will be given the chance to apply each year over an eight-year period. The program will continue to be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows. Farms located in the Massachusetts watersheds selected in 2005 may not be eligible to apply for CSP again until 2013.

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